



# Illinois Veteran News

An Update from the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs ★ March 2017

## ★ From the Director



March is Women's History Month - a time set aside to honor and celebrate the accomplishments of women. As an Army veteran, I want to sincerely thank the women who have served in the military - paving the way for so many of us and setting an example for all of us to follow. Our women veterans have served our country with honor, leadership and commitment. In the past decade, over 250,000 women have deployed to the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq where as many know, there are no clear lines. Thousands of women have been decorated for valor and too many have given their lives. As Army General Ann Dunwoody said, "Today, what was once a band of brothers has truly become a band of brothers and sisters." To every woman veteran - I salute you!

A few short weeks ago, in Late February, the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs held a Desert Shield / Desert Storm Remembrance Ceremony honoring the 17 Illinois Fallen heroes from that conflict. February 28th was the 26th anniversary of cease fire announcement ending the Persian Gulf War. Over 695,000 service members were deployed to the combat theater during the war. Another 5.7 million served in uniform stateside and elsewhere in the world between August 2, 1990 and September 10, 2001. The courage and sacrifice of those we honored at the ceremony must never be forgotten.

Finally, we have recently moved our Chicago headquarters out of the Thompson Center to the George Dunne Cook County Building located at 69 West Washington Street in Downtown Chicago, suite 1620. With this new office, we will add 2 Veterans Service Officers to serve our veterans. Please come by and see our new location, especially if we can assist you with any of your claims.

**Erica Jeffries**

*Director, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs*

Our mission at the IDVA is very simple. To serve those who have served. In doing so, we serve not only the men and women who have worn the uniform, but also their families. It is our privilege to be able to help our veterans receive the benefits they have earned through service to our nation. Our goal is to empower our veterans and their families to thrive in all aspects of their lives.

We know there are many veterans within our great state who do not require any assistance - but we still want to encourage you to "Stand Up and Be Counted!" by registering with your local VSO. In doing so, you're helping IDVA to do a better job of planning for services, seeking federal funding and understanding the needs of our veteran communities statewide. [Click here to register.](#)

**We Thank you for your service and for your sacrifice and we at the IDVA look forward to offering our services to You.**

## ★ Employee of the Quarter



*VSO Kurt Schierholz presenting the Korean War Medal to ARMY RETIRED LTC Joseph John O'Donnell. LTC O'Donnell served from 05/23/1949-09/17/1951 Active Duty and in the Korean Conflict. He received the Korean Service Medal with a Silver star (5 Bronze Stars equals 1 Silver Star), National Defense Service Medal, United Nations Service Medal, and Republic of Korea Medal.*

**Kurt Schierholz** became a VSO for the Kankakee County in December, 2015. In a very short time, he has shown wonderful compassion towards our Illinois Heroes and has accomplished much. Our Illinois Heroes, who are residents of the Illinois Veterans Home in Manteno are all

receiving the maximum benefit on Non Service Connected Pensions. Prior to Kurt's employment, the home was having to pull assets from other locations to assist in this endeavor. His hard work has enabled all service connected compensated veterans to be interviewed for higher ratings and when warranted, claims were opened for increases. This fine work also increased the maintenance fee or federal funds for the Home budget.

But Mr. Schierholz has accomplished much more. He worked hard and put in the additional time to insure the 'forgotten warriors' of the Korean conflict were honored with an award ceremony issuing the Korean War Medal to our veterans at the IVH-Manteno home. The Korean War Medal was not issued at their time of service, as this medal like many of the deeds in that era faded in history. VSO Schierholz found the injustice and rectified it by organizing the awards ceremony that took place on November 10, 2016. With Fanfare and family present at the home, 26 Illinois Veterans were issued their Korean War Medal. Congratulations Kurt on a job well done!

Honorable mentions go to Chris Pence - IT, Matthew Eddington - Legal, Kayleigh Obert - Ward Clerk and Dave MacDonna - Communications.

## ★ LaSalle Home

**February 28, 2017** IVH-L celebrated "Fat Tuesday" with a Mardi Gras shoe box float party. The different departments throughout the building all submitted their creative floats. The residents, staff, and visitors voted on their favorite float. King cakes and root beer were served for refreshments. Residents wore masks and beads to join in with the festivities.



On **Monday February 13, 2017** the Girl Scouts provided Root Beer Floats for all the residents with their supper. The girls made and delivered the floats with a hand-made Valentine's Day Card.

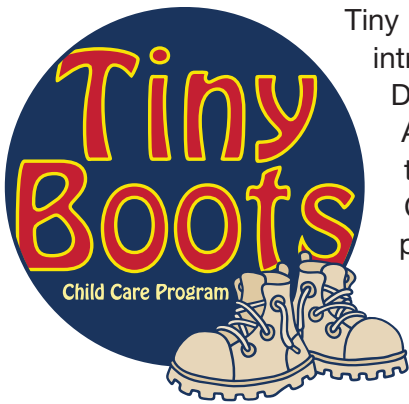


## ★ 26th Desert Storm Remembrance Ceremony

The IDVA hosted a Desert Storm Remembrance ceremony at the Illinois State Capitol Rotunda in Springfield last month. The Ceremony honored all Desert Storm veterans and paid tribute to the 17 Illinois heroes who lost their lives. Governor Bruce Rauner proclaimed February 28, 2017, as Desert Storm Remembrance Day in Illinois in memory of all the heroes who died in the attack on Desert Storm, and in tribute to all the men and women whose sacrifices made the world safer for liberty and freedom. Colonel Lance Koenig, Chief of Staff for Army Sustainment Command at Rock Island Arsenal was the keynote speaker. The ceremony included a memorial service for the Illinois Fallen Heroes with assistance from the Illinois Living History Detachment.



## ★ Taking a Big Step Forward with Tiny Boots



Tiny Boots is a new program introduced by the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs in partnership with the YWCA Metropolitan Chicago. This program provides temporary child-care for any Illinois Veteran who has a medical appointment or a job interview. Our veterans

can now get the medical treatment they need or explore job opportunities with peace of mind.

Registration for the program is simple – any eligible Veteran should contact the YWCA at <http://ywcachicago.org/tinybootsveterans> and fill out the Tiny Boots Program Application. To be eligible for this program veterans must be an Illinois veteran, have a verifiable medical appointment or job interview and notify the YWCA of appointments at least 1 week in advance. Visit the website for more details on the program.

Our mission at the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs is to help military veterans and their families to thrive. Tiny Boots is one resource that is helping us to carry out our mission – giving back to those who have given so much for all of us.

## ★ Illinois Veteran Benefits

Have you met with your IDVA VSO? If not, you could possibly not be receiving all the benefits that are due to you. Did you know you may qualify for the exemption of camping and admission fees who wish to camp in parks under the control of the Illinois Department of natural Resources? Did you know fishing and hunting licenses are not required for disabled veterans who are receiving 10% or greater service-connected compensation, or total disability pension benefits? See you VSO today to learn about all the benefits you earned! Go to <https://www.illinois.gov/veterans/Pages/ServiceOffices.aspx> to find the closest VSO to where you live.

## ★ IDVA hosts Tribute to African American Veterans



The IDVA hosted a tribute to African American Veterans last month at the James R. Thompson Center in Chicago. The ceremony honored all African American Veterans. “We are here today to salute and honor all African-American Veterans. These brave veterans have served honorably in the United States Military beginning with our nation’s war for independence,” said IDVA Director Erica Jeffries.

Several Montford Point Marine Veterans were in attendance at today’s ceremony. These veterans were the nation’s first African American Marines. From its inception until 1942, the Marine Corps refused to recruit African

Americans, American Indians and other minorities. Franklin D. Roosevelt’s creation of the Fair Employment Practices Commission in 1941 forced the Corps, despite objections from its leadership, to begin recruiting African American Marines in 1942. The Marines’ first black recruits received basic training at the segregated Montford Point Base adjacent to Camp Lejeune, NC and would continue to do so until 1949.

Commander Zeita Merchant was the keynote speaker. Commander Merchant is the Commanding Officer, Marine Safety Unit Chicago.

## ★ March hoops, frozen foods feed commissary savings

Frozen food savings, spotlighting healthy choices, the frenzy of college hoops and more take center stage in military commissaries during March. “We’ve got plenty of special deals for our patrons from frozen food month with exciting store displays to discounts connected to the annual college basketball championship tournament,” said Tracie Russ, sales director for the Defense Commissary Agency. DeCA’s industry partners – vendors, suppliers and brokers – are collaborating with commissaries in March to offer discounts beyond everyday savings. Overseas stores may have substitute events for certain promotional programs. Patrons can also see the Sales Flyer at [www.commissaries.com](http://www.commissaries.com) or get a copy at the store entrance. Go to [https://commissaries.com/press\\_room/press\\_release/2017/DeCA\\_14\\_17.cfm](https://commissaries.com/press_room/press_release/2017/DeCA_14_17.cfm) for more details.



## ★ New Employee

**Sonia Gove**, new Human Resources Specialist joined us on February 16, 2017. Her main responsibilities in Personnel include transactions and assisting regional offices in Hiring. If you would like to be scheduled for training she is the new Training Coordinator. She was originally from Administrative and Regulatory Shared Services Center with the Department of Revenue, hiring for 7 different agencies. When A&R SSC deconsolidated in August of 2016, she went to Illinois Lottery. Sonia has a strong background in all aspects of Hiring but also has experience with Transactions, Benefits, Evaluations and Payroll.

Sonia is a veteran. She did 15 years in the Illinois Army National Guard. She started on the enlisted side and went to Officer Candidate School after graduating from the University of Illinois at Champaign Urbana. She deployed with the 33rd Area Support Group out of Chicago from February 2004 – April 2005 to Afghanistan. In September of 2005 she went with the 634th Brigade Support Battalion to Louisiana for Hurricane Katrina and Rita. Her last rank was Captain as Commander of Co B of the 634th BSB in Champaign.

Sonia has been married over 10 years to Darren, he also a veteran and a current state employee. She is the mother of two boys, Joel age 8 and Carlos age 5. They are expecting a baby girl due 8/19/17.

## ★ IDVA Calendar

**3/14 Honor Lynn Brown – Employee of Quarter**

- Effingham

**3/15 Chief Renysa Brown's retirement from ILANG**

- Springfield

**3/15 Roll Call** - Chicago

**3/18 Chicago Wolves Game** - Rosemont

**3/22 Jacksonville College & Community Career Fair**

- Jacksonville

**3/29 Honoring Women Veterans**

- Prairie State College - Chicago Heights

**4/12 Hiring our Heroes**

Find details about all these events and others on our Events page of our website -

<https://www.illinois.gov/veterans/about-us/events/Pages/default.aspx>

## ★ Follow us



IDVA website

[www.illinois.gov/veterans](http://www.illinois.gov/veterans)

Facebook

[www.facebook.com/IllinoisDepartmentOfVeteransAffairs](http://www.facebook.com/IllinoisDepartmentOfVeteransAffairs)

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/IllinoisWomenVeterans/#>

Twitter

<https://twitter.com/ILVetsAffairs>

LinkedIn

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/il-dva>



State of Illinois  
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